

## **David Davis' Contribution to the Illinois Central Railroad**

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Imagine life in 1835. The only mode of transportation was by horse, foot or water. Trade between towns was weak because of the time it took to get from town to town. Illinois needed something to change, and the answer was a railroad. David Davis arrived in Pekin, Illinois at this time. Davis came to start his law career, as well as his career as a judge. He had no idea that he was going to help make plans for the Illinois Central Railroad that would later help abolish slavery in the United States. During his time in Pekin, Illinois, attorney Davis helped establish the location and use of the Illinois Central Railroad which allowed Illinoisans to value this mode of transportation.

When David Davis arrived in Illinois, he immediately got involved in law. He had intended on settling in St. Louis, Missouri, for more business and a better reputation. Although Davis thought St. Louis was the gold mine of his career, a relative of his, Levi Davis, steered David away from St. Louis and into Pekin. He thought St. Louis was too competitive, and he would have an easier time and more business in Pekin.

When Davis moved to Pekin, he started his law career. He soon attracted clients and also became well known around the area. In 1834, David Davis met Jesse Fell while he was visiting Pekin. He was also a lawyer at the time and together, they established the law firm of Davis and Fell. It was very successful. When Fell retired from law, he moved to Bloomington where he purchased a printing press and started a weekly

weekly newspaper. He included ads to support Davis' law firm, and also inserted articles of Davis' past and how he ended up in Pekin. This increased Davis' popularity throughout Illinois, especially Bloomington where the newspaper originated. Davis appreciated this kind act and in return, chose Fell as his best man at his wedding.

Although David was a lawyer in Pekin, he became a judge as well in 1834. As he was a judge, citizens from Pekin started coming to him with problems about the lack of transportation throughout Illinois. Businesses were having trouble importing and exporting goods to other companies in Illinois, and someone needed to take charge. Davis realized this was a serious matter, and that he could make a difference. Davis went to Jesse Fell for a favor to help him settle this problem. Together they thought of a way to solve the problem in Illinois, and their answer was the Illinois Central Railroad. The railroad was planned to take a major part in the economy and made Illinois one of the more complex states in America.

The main idea for the Illinois Central Railroad was to enable Illinoisans to import and export goods into and out of the state, as well as to allow people to travel to other cities around Illinois. The destination for the railroad was through the center of the state and then to the Wabash River, where goods would be loaded onto barges and shipped to other parts of the country. David Davis and Jesse Fell then needed to establish locations through which the railroads would pass, which was definitely not possible. The final plans for the railroad were to start building in Pekin and continue into Bloomington, from

where it would then head toward the Wabash River. The main use of the railroad was to ship goods throughout the state, as well as people traveling around Illinois. Construction of the railroad started in 1835 and was finally built and ready for use in 1838. The railroad turned out to be a huge boost for the Illinois economy, and the railroad helped Illinois to become a leader in livestock production. David Davis was immediately known for his actions and was a hero in Illinois. Furthermore, he was known for his leadership and bravery for stepping up to help Illinois establish its first modern form of transportation, the Illinois Central Railroad.

Although the railroad boosted Illinois' economy with transporting goods throughout the state, it also later helped Illinois and the rest of the country in a more desperate time of need, the Civil War. During the Civil War, in 1862, the railroad was extended into Louisiana and near to the Gulf of Mexico. It joined the Jackson and Great Northern railroads in New Orleans. The railroad took a pivotal role in transporting troops and supplies from Illinois into Confederate territory for war. In addition, it assisted the Union side to victory. Without the railroad, the Confederates could have won the war and slavery could still exist today. The railroad ended up preparing Illinois for war; something that Illinois or David Davis expected from it. Illinois took advantage of their railroad, something the Confederates did not have, and as a result the Union side won the war and slavery was abolished.

In conclusion, during this time in Pekin, Illinois, attorney David Davis helped establish locations and uses for the Illinois Central railroad, allowing Illinoisans to value

this mode of transportation. Over his lifetime, David Davis met many people, who helped him become one of Illinois' most famous historical citizens. During a time of need in Illinois, this man stepped up to help establish the Illinois Central Railroad, which would later help the Union side win the Civil War. Because of his leadership, he will be remembered forever in the history of Illinois. [From *A Brief Historical Sketch of the Illinois Central Railroad*. Illinois Central Historical Society. [www.icrrhistorical.org/icrr.history.html](http://www.icrrhistorical.org/icrr.history.html). (Sept. 17, 2004); *David Davis*, [www.google.com](http://www.google.com). (Sept. 6, 2004); *David Davis*, [www.lib.edu.org](http://www.lib.edu.org). (Sept. 6, 2004); William L. King, *Lincoln's Manager*; James E. Myers, *The Man Who Made Lincoln President*; Chicago Tribune Feb. 10, 1980; and John Sciutto, *30 Years and Building Steam, Iron Horse Times*, Dec. 2, 2003.]